

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

DEAN

Office of Discovery, Education
and Affiliate Networks

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

Foreword

Each ridge of a single fingerprint tells a story. When combined in unique fashion with other ridges, they become a diverse set of loops, whorls, or arches that can leave a lasting impression.

Over the next several pages, you'll read about the people, offices, and initiatives that made up DEAN's fingerprint in FY21. I'm particularly excited that much of our story is told by the many DEAN staff, VHA frontline employees, and Veterans whose words are featured throughout the report.

Reflecting on the year itself, 2021 was one of historic firsts: from leading the largest expansion of nursing programs in VA history to reaching our goal of having all research programs on a shared platform for review and approval.

This past year also saw the start of many significant efforts and initiatives. For example, we launched a pilot program expanding Veterans' access to dental care and a partnership network to prevent Veteran suicide.

As COVID-19 continued to test the Nation, DEAN continued to support VA's Fourth Mission by investigating new treatments, assessing the impact of long COVID, and evaluating the feasibility of 3D-printed nasal swabs.

In between, we invited Veterans to partner with us in reimagining their healthcare and joined our academic affiliates in celebrating 75 years of partnering to train the next generation of healthcare providers.

With Secretary Denis McDonough at the helm, we further sharpened DEAN's focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), bringing together internal and external stakeholders along the way. A winter retreat among DEAN senior leaders resulted in an ad hoc working group on DEI, and a summer Minority Summit brought together more than 500 Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), academic affiliates, and professional organizations. An overview of how we made our mark this year is provided as a special section.

I am incredibly proud of the work you're about to read and the formidable imprint made by DEAN on the lives of Veterans and the Nation's healthcare.



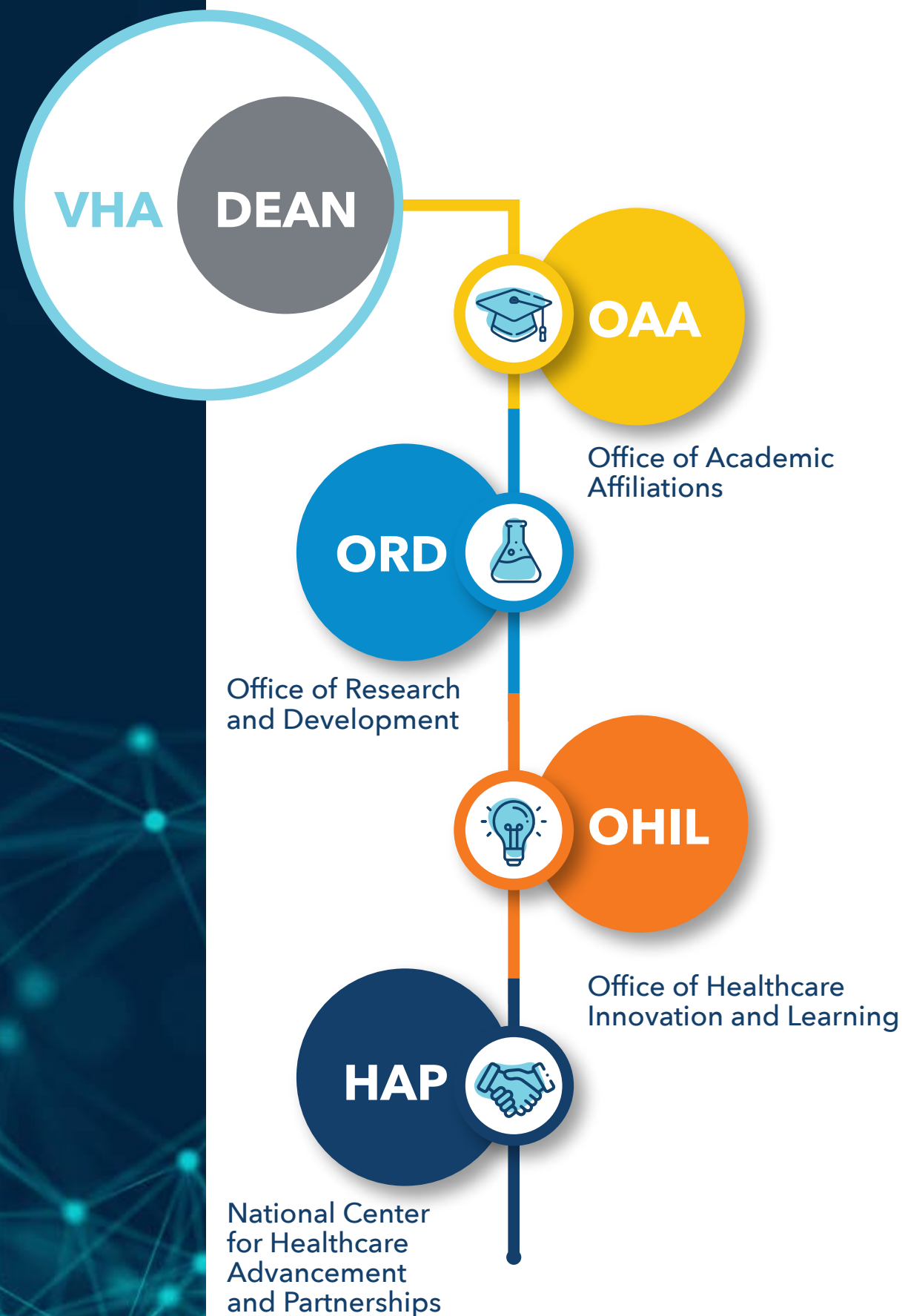
Carolyn M. Clancy, MD

Assistant Under Secretary for Health
Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks
Veterans Health Administration



Contents

- 01 About DEAN**
- 03 2021 Program Office Highlights**
 - 05** Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA)
 - 09** Office of Research & Development (ORD)
 - 13** Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning (OHIL)
 - 19** VHA National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP)
- 23 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
- 31 2021 and Beyond**
 - 33** Recognizing Success
 - 36** Looking Ahead



About DEAN

Transforming healthcare for Veterans and the Nation through innovation, training, research, and partnerships.

This is DEAN's mission. Both collectively and individually, DEAN offices proactively address some of healthcare's most challenging issues, leaving an indelible impression on VHA, as well as non-VHA healthcare.

This work is accomplished through DEAN's affiliated program offices:



The Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) which, through its extensive graduate medical education programs, trains the next generation of healthcare providers.



The Office of Research and Development's (ORD) 95-year-old research program, which is embedded as part of the Nation's single largest healthcare system.



The Office of Healthcare Learning and Innovation, which improves existing processes and rapidly disseminates learning through the VHA Innovation Ecosystem, Simulation Learning Evaluation and Research Network (SimLEARN), and as of 2021, the Center for Care and Payment Innovation (CCPI); and,



The VHA National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (formerly the Office of Community Engagement) which expands and strengthens collaboration with national and local organizations.

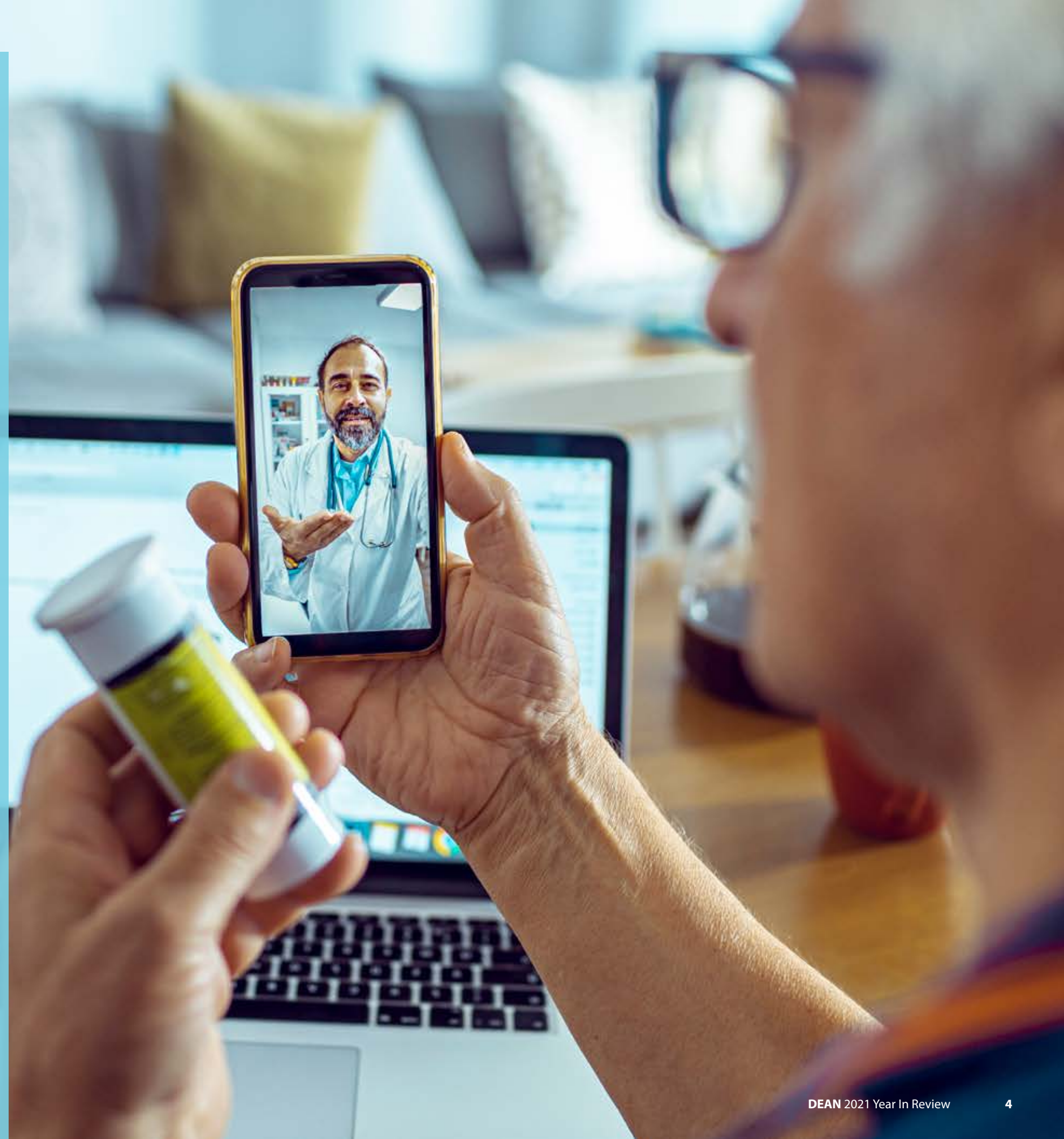
Together, these offices promote a culture of shared learning across the VHA enterprise that empowers all personnel to discover and advance the best healthcare solutions.



2021 Program Office Highlights

"I wake up every morning
excited to make Veterans'
care better and safer."

Jessica Feinleib, MD, PhD
Simulation Expert, SimLEARN





VHA OAA conducts the Nation's largest education and training program for health professions trainees through affiliations with over 1,800 academic institutions, including 97% of U.S. medical schools. VA and our academic partners are the backbone of the American medical system, preparing new healthcare professionals to meet the complex needs of our Veterans and citizens.

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

For 75 years, VA has worked with academic institutions to provide high-quality, state-of-the-art healthcare to Veterans and train new health professionals to meet the rapidly evolving healthcare needs within VA and the Nation. This remarkable partnership traces back to 1946 when VA struggled to address the needs of over 100,000 new patients arriving by the end of World War II. To meet this challenge, VA struck a landmark deal outlined in Policy Memorandum No. 2, Policy in Association of Veterans' Hospitals with Medical Schools. In FY21, OAA recognized this longstanding collaboration with the 2021 Minority Summit that brought together representatives of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) across the country with VA Secretary McDonough and VA officials to further and expand VA/MSI affiliations. The year-long anniversary recognition also included celebrations and media features at several VA sites.



WATCH
A VIDEO
HERE



70% The percent of all physicians in the U.S. who complete training at VA

97% The number of U.S. medical schools affiliated with VA

"Our impact goes beyond being the Nation's largest provider of training for future healthcare professionals. VA is also leading the way in interprofessional training to care for the whole Veteran, teaching evidence-based medicine and a strong, coordinated care approach."

Marjorie A. Bowman, MD
Chief Academic Affiliations Officer

RURAL INTERPROFESSIONAL FACULTY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

OAA and the VHA Office of Rural Health (ORH) jointly created the Rural Interprofessional Faculty Development Initiative (RIFDI) to address healthcare provider shortages in rural areas. This program uses education as a hiring pipeline to increase access and improve care for Veterans, building upon clinicians' tendency to work where they trained and the higher satisfaction rates among clinicians who teach. Existing VA clinicians are trained to be teachers. To date, 85 participants from 34 VA sites representing 20 clinical professions have participated in the RIFDI program, improving health professions training in VA locations from Sheridan, Wyoming to Togus, Maine.

80K

The number of Graduate Medical Education residents who train at VA each year, providing direct patient care

25K+

The number of nursing trainees who receive all or part of their training at VA each year



60-70% Of VA podiatrists, psychologists, and physicians trained at VA

20%

The percent of the Nation's accredited psychology internship programs provided by VA

50%

The percent of the Nation's accredited postdoctoral psychology programs provided by VA

NURSE RESIDENCY EXPANSION

OAA led the largest expansion of nurse residency programs in VA history in Academic Year 2021-2022, adding 28 new programs to help address one of VA's - and the Nation's - most critical healthcare occupation shortages. For new registered nurses or nurse practitioner graduates, VA nurse residencies provide competency-based advanced training, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to address the specific needs of Veterans and the community. The programs include 14 new Post-Baccalaureate Registered Nurse Residency programs, ten Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Residency programs and four Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Residency programs. Since 2018, VA has expanded nurse residency programs from 17 to 108 across the U.S. With new nursing residency programs, VA will train 550 nurse residents in Academic Year 2021-2022.

"The Nurse Practitioner Residency program has a big interdisciplinary component. You work with other members of the healthcare team to achieve together the health goals for the patient. Those are skills that will ultimately benefit the care being provided and the quality of care that you are able to give."

Claire Regan, DNP

Nurse Practitioner Resident
VA Maryland Health Care System

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY FELLOWSHIP AND PHYSICAL THERAPY RESIDENCY EDUCATION EXPANSION

In 2021, OAA realized the largest rehabilitation education expansion in VA history, awarding funding to establish 42 new Physical Therapy (PT) residencies and Occupational Therapy (OT) fellowships across 24 VA Medical Centers over three years. The increased need for rehabilitation services (particularly in geriatrics, long-term care, home-based and community care, and mental health services) drove OAA's decision to keep VA at the forefront of accredited advanced post-graduate training for these therapists. PT residencies and OT fellowships provide advanced practice skills for these rehabilitation professionals to meet the complex medical needs of Veterans in a team-based environment.



TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

\$1B+

The amount of funds invested by VA annually to train future health professionals for VA and the Nation

468

The number of medical professionals who completed Advanced Fellowships in **21** clinical and non-clinical programs

99%

The percent of positions awarded to support specific Veteran care needs under the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 over three years ahead of the 2024 deadline

~118K

The number of trainees who participated in over **7K** training programs offered through partnerships between **170** VA Medical Centers and over **1.8K** academic institutions



ORD Office of Research and Development

Through ORD, VA covers the full gamut of health research, from basic sciences like biomedical laboratory studies to clinical trials, data analyses, and studies of how healthcare is delivered and how it can be improved. As part of an integrated healthcare system where more than 60% of VA investigators also provide direct patient care, VHA is uniquely positioned to more quickly translate research findings into everyday practice and care for Veterans.

COVID-19 'LONG-HAULERS' FACE INCREASED RISK OF DEATH AND MANY OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS

One of the largest post-acute COVID-19 studies to date showed that people who have had COVID-19 are at increased risk of death and other subsequent health problems in the first six months after their diagnosis. VA Saint Louis Health Care System researchers characterized many potential long-term consequences of COVID-19, based on

outcomes from over 73,000 VA patients who survived COVID-19 and close to five million who did not contract the disease. People who have recovered from COVID-19 also are at increased risk of health problems affecting virtually every organ system in the body, not just the lungs. About 8-10% of the recoverees will likely have long-term effects.

IN 2021



\$795M

Congressional appropriation for VA medical and prosthetic research



13.9K

The number of published research articles authored or co-authored by VA investigators



\$2.09B

Total research budget (including other VA and non-VA sources, such as NIH)

VA STUDIES 3D-PRINTED NASAL SWABS TO TEST FOR COVID-19

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reported severe shortages of supplies to test for the novel coronavirus. To guard against further shortages, VA researchers are evaluating 3D-printed nasal swabs to augment traditional swabs for testing. Led by Dr. Joseph Iaquinto, a VA biomedical engineer at the Center for Limb Loss and Mobility (Puget Sound, WA), the team has been examining the feasibility of five different types of 3D swabs, two of which VA produced. Since the start of the pandemic, VA has helped build a more resilient supply chain, including personal protective equipment, to support VA's quick response to the pandemic.



VA CLINICAL TRIAL SEEKS BEST TREATMENT FOR VETERANS WITH EARLY STAGE LUNG CANCER

Over 8,000 VA patients are diagnosed with lung cancer each year. It is the second most common type of cancer in the Nation, and the leading cause of cancer deaths. Researchers in the VA Lung Cancer Surgery Or Stereotactic Radiotherapy (VALOR) clinical trial are evaluating two types of treatment for lung cancer— surgery and radiation therapy. They hope to determine which treatment results in a better five-year survival rate for stage 1 non-small cell lung cancer. The study is being conducted in ten VA Medical Centers over five years, and investigators hope to enroll 670 participants.



LEARN
MORE
HERE



"I didn't even know that I had cancer until they told me. I would definitely recommend that other Veterans get screened for lung cancer."

Bobby Richardson, Veteran

7.3K

Active funded research projects (including VA funding and other sources)

3.6K

Active funded principal investigators (with funding from VA or other sources)

PREVENTING SUICIDE AFTER PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALIZATION

The World Health Organization's Brief Intervention and Contact (BIC) program has shown some success at preventing suicide in patients following a psychiatric hospitalization. Researchers at the White River Junction VA tested the effectiveness of BIC adapted for VA patients. The VA BIC program consists of six sessions within three months of discharge. Sessions include discussions about suicide prevention resources, motivation, and social support. One month after discharge, the intervention led to meaningful reductions in suicidal thoughts. VA BIC also led to improvements in social connectedness and engagement, and a reduction in feelings of hopelessness.



LEADING INVESTIGATORS HONORED DURING NATIONAL VA RESEARCH WEEK

During National VA Research Week 2021, VA marked the achievements of eight exceptional VA researchers who have made significant advancements in basic science and healthcare for Veterans and others. Their work builds on collaborations with colleagues across the VA research enterprise and with partners from academia, industry, and other federal agencies. The theme of National VA Research Week 2021 was “One Team, One Mission,” reflecting the unified infrastructure and mission of VA research nationwide.



WATCH
A VIDEO
HERE

BETTER PREPARED: VA SHIELD (CENTRAL BIOSPECIMEN AND DATA REPOSITORY)

VA Science and Health Initiative to Combat Infectious and Life-Threatening Diseases (VA SHIELD) is a comprehensive, secure biorepository of specimens and associated data related to COVID-19 and other emerging diseases. Specimens and data collected from VA sites nationwide are available to authorized VA

investigators—and, under certain circumstances, to their external collaborators. The goal is to advance scientific understanding and support the development of new diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventive strategies. In addition to advancing medical care for Veterans and others, VA SHIELD supports VA’s Fourth Mission: to improve the Nation’s preparedness for national emergencies and to support emergency management, public health, safety, and homeland security.

VA Researchers Who Served:

Yani Leyva, PhD

“As a Veteran with a disability, I’m greatly committed to providing Veterans with the best possible care. I’m also a big proponent of encouraging Veterans to actively engage in research studies that can improve the level of care they receive at VA.”



VA, DOD STUDY MYSTERIES OF TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

The Long-term Impact of Military Relevant Brain Injury Consortium (LIMBIC) study features the world’s largest group of Veterans and service members dedicated to studying mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI). Jointly funded by Department of Defense (DoD) and VA, this research collaboration aims to address the diagnostic challenges and therapeutic ramifications of mTBI and its potential long-term effects.

“It’s just great to know that you’re doing something to possibly help out your brothers and sisters in the military. I’ve pretty much been through everything and had a lot of close calls out there. Now that I’m back in the states, it’s great to be able to help wherever possible.”

Joseph Montanari
Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran

‘STARPORT’ TRIAL PROBES NEW APPROACH FOR AGGRESSIVE PROSTATE CANCER

A new VA study examines an innovative treatment plan for men whose prostate cancer has spread to a limited number of distant areas despite initial treatment with surgery or radiation. The multisite clinical trial is funded by VA’s Cooperative Studies Program.

“Improved treatments are needed for these men whose prostate cancer has spread and who are left without a lifesaving option. Promising evidence suggests that men with limited areas of spread may benefit from adding radiation or surgery that targets metastatic lesions to today’s standard treatment with hormones.”

Abhishek Solanki, MD
Lead Investigator

VA Researchers Who Served:

Gabriel Gonzales, PhD

“My military service inspired me to pursue a career in research. I was very pleased to find out that VA has such a great and well-funded research program. I immediately applied to join the ranks as a research biologist. At VA, my goal is to find better treatments and clinical applications that will enhance the quality of life for Veterans.”



NANOPARTICLE DRUG DELIVERY TECHNIQUE SHOWS PROMISE FOR TREATING PANCREATIC CANCER

Researchers with the Kansas City VA Medical Center and North Dakota State University have designed a new way to deliver pancreatic cancer drugs that could make fighting the disease much easier. Encapsulating cancer drugs in nanoparticles shows the potential to target tumors more effectively while also avoiding damage to other parts of the body. Currently, the most effective treatment for pancreatic cancer is toxic to other parts of the body and quickly breaks down, limiting its effectiveness. To address these issues, researchers developed polymer nanoparticles that can release the drug once they reach cancer cells.



Research facilities nationwide





CCPI

Center for Care and
Payment Innovation

OHIL's newest office, CCPI collaborates across government and industry to design, evaluate, and scale innovative payment and service delivery approaches to enhance the quality of care for Veterans and drive value throughout the Department. This work, authorized via Section 152 of the 2018 MISSION Act, is being accomplished through a series of pilot programs.

ENABLING ACCESS TO DENTAL SERVICES

In July, CCPI launched its first pilot, VETSmile: Connecting Veterans with Dentists in their Communities. The VETSmile program aims to improve affordable access to continuous and comprehensive dental services for VA-enrolled Veterans who are ineligible to receive dental benefits through VA. Initial VETSmile partners include four community dental care providers offering services at 19 locations in New York City and New Jersey. CCPI plans to expand the program by partnering with several additional dental care providers from across the country.

"VETSmile is an opportunity for us to bridge the gap in Veterans' access to continuous, accessible, and affordable oral care, which is crucial for their overall well-being."

Roshni Ghosh, MD
Acting Executive Director, CCPI



OHIL brings together three programs to deliver on VHA's mission to innovate: VHA Innovation Ecosystem (VHA IE), the Simulation Learning, Evaluation, Assessment and Research Network (SimLEARN), and the Center for Care and Payment Innovation (CCPI). Through its core programs, OHIL advances healthcare delivery and service and cements VHA as a learning organization and as a global leader in healthcare innovation. Together, these offices provide innovative solutions that change and save Veteran lives.

SINCE VETSMILE'S
LAUNCH ON JULY 1

19

The number of participating
dental care sites

~900

The number of dental visits

~600

The number of Veterans who
have received dental services



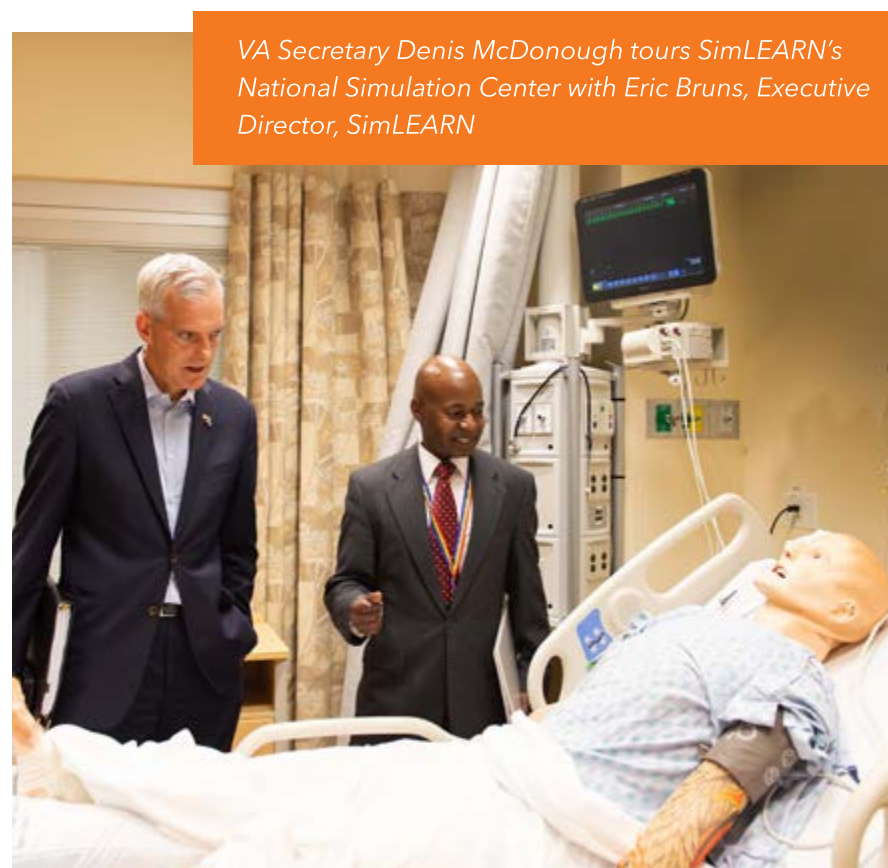
Setting the standard for healthcare with reliable, relevant, and data-driven simulation-based clinical education and tools, robust assessment, and research that add enterprise-wide impact and value, SimLEARN aims to be an indispensable asset to the VHA enterprise and its partners. SimLEARN provides world-class services to Veterans through innovation and simulation education.

RESUSCITATION SIMULATION SYSTEM TESTING

High-quality CPR is paramount to providing high-quality care. Through its Resuscitation Education and Innovation (REdI) program, SimLEARN continually strives to improve CPR quality and health outcomes through simulation training based on a high-reliability framework. Such a framework allows an interdisciplinary healthcare team to function in an environment as close as possible to an actual clinical situation without placing patients at risk. REdI provides focused, quality reviews through Resuscitation Simulation System Testing (RSST), which reviews facility data and tests the process through a simulation-based strategy to identify and mitigate potential risks related to the medical emergency response. By working to provide VHA employees with the right tools, processes, and technologies to respond during a medical emergency, REdI exemplifies SimLEARN's ongoing commitment to VHA's journey as a high reliability and learning organization.



LEARN
MORE
HERE



VA Secretary Denis McDonough tours SimLEARN's National Simulation Center with Eric Bruns, Executive Director, SimLEARN

201

The number of learners engaged in a SimLEARN instructor-led Escape Room course

223

The number of students trained through SimLEARN's Out of Operating Room Management courses and Trauma Nursing Core Courses

301K

The number of participants in the Resuscitation Education and Innovation's (REdI) portfolio of courses

~1.2K

The number of
Community of Practice
(CoP) participants

6.8K

The number of
subscribers to
SimLEARN's Simulation
Exchange Newsletter



ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

As VHA readies for large-scale change to its Electronic Health Records Management (EHRM), SimLEARN has been leading the way in workflow optimization and improving the end-user experience. To prepare VHA for this transformation, the office provided hands-on, end-to-end training to front-line personnel. With its expertise in experiential learning, testing, and validating clinical performance and its innovation for new behaviors and processes, SimLEARN is well-positioned for this critical initiative. Through partnerships with facility leaders and staff, the VHA Office of Information and Technology, clinical experts, and change management champions, SimLEARN has leveraged its existing strengths and developed innovative virtual and in-person workflow testing. It has also identified and shared best practices for implementation, thus empowering local and national teams to serve Veterans better.

"SimLEARN and the National Simulation Center provide comprehensive healthcare testing, evaluation, and training in a simulated hospital environment, coupling the expertise of our staff with partners throughout VHA, academic institutions and private sector organizations."

Eric Bruns
Executive Director, SimLEARN

NEEDS OF VA STAFF IN MIND: CONSTRUCTION FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

The SimLEARN Assessment, Collaboration, and Outreach (ACO) System/Hospital Activation team partnered with the Office of Facilities Standards Service (FSS) and the Office of Construction and Facilities Management (CFM) to test designs before the start of design and construction by using Simulation-based Healthcare Design Testing (SbHDT). Preliminary testing of the safety and functionality of designs was completed in June using a full-scale mock-up of multiple treatment areas and developmental equipment and supplies from the new Emergency Services Design Guide. SbHDT used common and high-risk clinical scenarios to confirm that all rooms can accommodate a variety of staff configurations, equipment, and workflows to effectively meet the needs of clinical staff providing care to Veterans. Significant changes were made, such as the location of emergency equipment, the orientation of a bed in the room, and more. The results from these activities help SimLEARN evaluate safety and functionality and any subsequent impact on workflow.

VHA IE empowers frontline employees and leverages the collective power of external partners from academia, industry, non-profits, and other government agencies to facilitate mission-driven, healthcare innovation.

UNDERSTANDING VETERANS' NEEDS: REIMAGINING VETERAN HEALTHCARE

Reimagining Veteran Healthcare (RVH) aims to address critical changes in customer and employee needs and expectations, uncover the current state of Veteran healthcare, and understand post-pandemic priorities and behaviors of Veterans through a human-centered design (HCD) approach. By conducting ethnographic interviews with a diverse group of approximately 50 Veterans, RVH seeks to unearth and expose the opportunities for transformational change brought about by COVID-19. To determine which Veteran groups to engage, RVH conducted a current-state assessment of VA healthcare with an eye to global

healthcare trends and adjacent industries. In depth interviews were conducted with Veterans to understand their experiences navigating VA and the healthcare system at-large. The themes that emerged will be prioritized and explored to identify and create transformational opportunity areas.



"The work on this project has reconnected us with the belief that healthcare should be about people taking care of people."

Brynn Cole
Government Lead: Reimagining Veteran Healthcare HCD Project, VHA IE

INTRODUCING THE GREENHOUSE INITIATIVE

In FY21, VHA Innovators Network (iNET) introduced the Greenhouse, an initiative that brings together VHA Subject Matter Experts (SME), Veterans, and external innovators to co-design and test early-stage innovative healthcare products, furthering iNET's mission to provide frontline employees with opportunities to participate in the "process" of innovation and insert VA's voice into tomorrow's healthcare solutions. By partnering with iNET, external innovators receive the end-user feedback necessary to developing and refining functional prototypes as well as conducting small-scale product feasibility testing. During its first year, the Greenhouse supported 34 such collaborations, driving cultural change across VHA, including a solution that helps Veterans navigate the challenges of aging, a robotic system that assembles surgical trays, portable parallel bars for physical therapy, and a single-operator bed transfer platform.



LAUNCHING EXTENDED REALITY (XR) NETWORK

VHA employees nationwide are rapidly adopting extended reality technologies—an umbrella term that includes virtual, augmented, and mixed reality technologies—for therapeutic and medical applications. To address numerous hurdles encountered by new and existing XR initiatives, VHA IE launched the XR Network. This initiative aims to ensure that the implementation of XR in healthcare is relevant to our Veterans by uniting frontline staff and Program Offices at VHA with industry, academia, non-profits, and other government agencies to improve knowledge-gathering, share resources and lessons learned, and empower discovery and growth. XR is increasingly being used across VA sites to improve patient care. With it, Veterans wear headsets to extend, simulate, and navigate virtual worlds to deal with any number of ailments or conditions, including post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, chronic pain, and even boredom.

IN ITS FIRST YEAR, XR NETWORK HAD:

- +225** Frontline participants active at
- 81** Medical sites and engaged with
- 11** Program offices exploring
- 20** Different XR use cases



INNOVATING COLLABORATIVELY: GIOSTENT

GioStent is an innovation developed collaboratively between VHA staff at VA Puget Sound Health Care System, Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, and Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center, and a Veteran patient, Michael Nicoletti. Faced with surgery to address hearing degradation, Mr. Nicoletti created a straw-like device to open his collapsing ear canals. He engaged his Audiologist at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, South Carolina. The 3D Innovation Center at Charleston VA Advanced



Manufacturing Hub created and perfected the 3D-printed device, an ear stent inserted in the external ear canal to keep it from collapsing and allow sound to pass through, customized to his unique hearing needs. The device was granted VHA's first-ever approval for an investigational 3D-printed compassionate use authorization by the FDA. GioStent shows tremendous promise as a non-surgical option for collapsed ear canals and conductive hearing loss.



In 2021, the Office of Community Engagement and the Center for Compassionate Care Innovation officially became VHA National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP). Under its new name, HAP's mission is to foster partnerships and health innovations for Veterans. This year, HAP expanded its portfolio with eight new partnerships. HAP also led another successful National Community Partnership Challenge celebrating how VHA and organizations in the community collaborate during times of uncertainty to meet Veterans' needs through community partnerships built on a foundation of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access.



PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS



VHA and Salesforce recently entered into a partnership aimed at helping Veterans, military service members, and their spouses who are transitioning out of military service with free training, education, and job opportunities through Salesforce Military, a program committed to upskilling the military community with high demand technology skills and providing partners with a diverse and trained talent pipeline. Through this partnership, VHA and Salesforce have built a unique online training for the Salesforce Military community and the public about VA benefits that provide support across social determinants of health. VHA and Salesforce have also helped Veterans access VA programs like Personalized Career Planning and Guidance, and community partner programs like Trailhead Military.



LEARN
MORE
HERE

WITHIN THE FIRST YEAR OF THE **SALESFORCE** PARTNERSHIP:

+1.2K

Veterans, service members, and military spouses have registered for the Salesforce Trailhead Military program after hearing about it from VA

+2.5K

Trailhead members have completed the VA Benefits for Veterans online training



HAP formally partnered in 2020 with OnStar to enhance Veteran suicide prevention efforts. When in crisis, Veterans and their families enrolled in the program can push a red emergency button in their General Motors vehicle or on the OnStar Guardian app to reach an OnStar Emergency-Certified Advisors who can, if appropriate, connect them with the VA's Veterans Crisis Line. Over 400 VA suicide prevention coordinators and their teams are available daily to provide this support. Through the partnership, VA offers additional training to OnStar Advisors to help identify military Veterans and learn about Veteran-specific conditions and resources.



VA diagnoses 7,700 Veterans with lung cancer each year, with an estimated 900,000 at risk. To improve Veterans' health and well-being, VHA and the American Lung Association (ALA) partnered to provide collaborative education and services for Veterans living with lung disease. This partnership helps Veterans access ALA's online resources and support groups; gives ALA's partners and providers an opportunity to learn more about Veteran-specific issues, including suicide prevention; and encourages VA Medical Centers and regional ALA affiliates to create local partnerships that can increase Veterans' awareness and access to support. VA continues to conduct groundbreaking research, studies, and clinical projects on topics like the risks of e-cigarettes, tuberculosis treatment, and sleep apnea.

The Veteran Sponsor Partnership Network

The Veteran Sponsor Partnership Network (VSPN), a new healthcare advancement initiative led by HAP and announced in September 2021, is one of the many ways VA meets Veterans where they are to support their unique needs. The VSPN initiative is based on the DOD military sponsor program and is an evidence-based approach to help Veterans achieve better outcomes across social determinants of health after military transition to civilian status. VSPN leverages non-monetary partnerships between VA and community organizations to help service members, Veterans, and their families experience less difficulty when transitioning back into civilian communities and reduce risk factors related to death by suicide.

WITHIN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF THE **VSPN** PARTNERSHIP:

709

The number of sponsors trained by VHA

12

The number of VSPN partners

569

The number of Service Members and Veterans supported



VHA National Community Partnership Challenge

The VHA National Community Partnership Challenge is an annual contest that highlights nonmonetary collaborations between VHA and nongovernmental organizations to acknowledge the top three grassroots initiatives led by VHA employees. HAP is honored to facilitate this annual event on behalf of the Office of the Under Secretary for Health. Unique ideas, best practices, and innovative approaches allow VA to attain goals by closing gaps in services while encouraging organic replication across the U.S. This year, nearly 40 facilities applied and included examples of how the local partnership addressed the 2021 theme: Adaptability in a Changing World within interest areas of clinical and self-care, support for social determinants of health, newly transitioning service members, COVID-19/pandemic or flu, and caregivers that are based on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).



LEARN
MORE
HERE

2021 WINNERS

RALPH H. JOHNSON VA MEDICAL CENTER - VETERAN SAFETY AND PLANNING WITH COMMUNITY HOSPITALS TO PREVENT SUICIDE

This collaboration with six community partners aims to advance clinical care to Veterans transitioning from community inpatient mental health treatment to VA outpatient treatment. The partnerships improve care coordination and address the increased risk for suicidal behaviors and deaths following the days and weeks after discharge. Since tracking began in September 2020, this collaboration ensured appropriate follow-up care for 103 Veterans.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN MENTAL ILLNESS RESEARCH EDUCATION AND CLINICAL CENTER - SUICIDE PREVENTION

This learning collaborative model aids community partners in building suicide prevention programs within their organizations and is designed to increase clinical access and promote well-being for all Veterans while improving social determinants of health. Similarly, the Transit program assists Veterans at-risk for suicide in finding permanent mental health placements and other resources in the community. Suicide prevention program partners, including seven community partners and six governmental organizations, provide suicide prevention activities to at least 2,500 Veterans directly.



VA PALO ALTO HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PARTNERS TO PROVIDE LEGAL SERVICES FOR VETERANS

This medical and legal partnership brings together wraparound legal services and support by culturally competent social workers to help Veterans struggling to overcome barriers to achieving positive healthcare and non healthcare outcomes, such as housing, food security, transportation, and economic stability. Integrating screening for legal assistance into Veterans' well-being assessment and linking Veterans with a cost-free attorney allow Veterans to focus on their well-being and increase their access to health and mental healthcare. Bay Legal transitioned to remote work during the pandemic, and VHA social workers provided instrumental support by ensuring continued communication between the Veterans and Bay Legal's attorney. The total value of free legal services to Veterans is \$973,428.

"Collaboration has been essential to HAP's success in military to civilian transition, positive social determinants of health, and healthcare innovation. Because of HAP's dedicated team, more Veterans and their families received care and access to health and wellness resources."

Tracy L. Weistreich, PhD, RN
Nurse Executive, HAP



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

“We need our workforce to look like America—not only because that’s the right thing to do, but because it can save lives. The work we’re doing here is as simple and important as that.”

Denis McDonough

Secretary of Veterans Affairs



As many experts have observed, the COVID-19 public health crisis amplified pre-existing healthcare disparities. Although these inequities have been far smaller at VHA than those observed in the private sector, more work remains. Over the past year, and in alignment with VA Secretary Denis McDonough’s top priority to leave no Veteran behind when it comes to achieving their best health, DEAN strengthened efforts to develop a more diverse clinical and investigator workforce, expand its health equity research portfolio, and forge new collaborations to address disparities in care.

SENIOR LEADERS FORM DEI WORKING GROUP

During their annual strategic retreat, DEAN Senior Leaders designated DEI one of four strategic priorities and established an internal working group to make recommendations. Composed of members from each affiliate program office, the working group has been active across VHA on three primary focus areas: collaborating with VHA Human Resources to increase inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in recruitment efforts, particularly for clinicians and researchers; partnering with ORD and VHA Community Development and Civic Engagement to encourage youth to pursue research volunteer opportunities related to STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math); and working with ORD to expand its pilot program for recruitment of college STEM students into research activities.



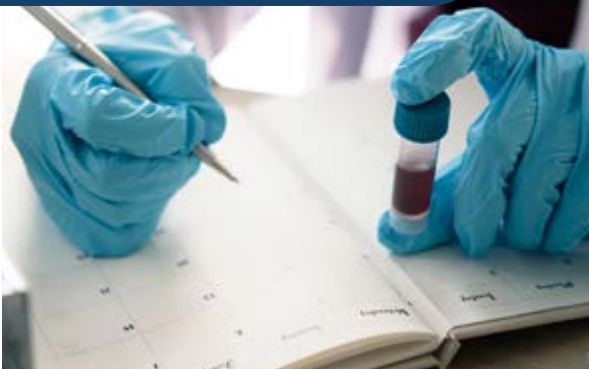
2021 MINORITY SUMMIT SEEKS TO EXPAND DIVERSITY IN HEALTH PROFESSIONS TRAINEES

Over 500 participants from MSIs, academic affiliates, and professional organizations attended VA’s 2021 Minority Summit: *The Power of Collaborating with VA*, hosted by OAA on June 9th, to find ways to advance VA academic partnerships with MSIs and expand diversity in health professions trainees. The summit highlighted VA clinical training opportunities, scholarships, loan programs,

and research grants. VA partners with more than 1,800 unique colleges and universities, including nearly 200 MSIs, to provide dynamic, comprehensive health professions training to prepare the next generation of clinicians and healthcare leaders. Approximately 20,000 health professionals from MSIs train at VA each year. VA’s education and training mission encompasses the Department’s efforts to prepare culturally competent, diverse health professionals who reflect the Veterans they serve and understand their backgrounds and experiences to build trusting relationships that improve Veteran health outcomes.

MENTORING EARLY-CAREER SCIENTISTS

The VA Research Scientist Training Program seeks to increase the number of underrepresented minority scientists participating in VA research. The centerpiece of this program is an MSI-focused Career Development Award (CDA-2 mechanism) to support early-career scientists who are affiliated with MSIs in collaboration with their local VA medical centers.



VA is affiliated with more than 200 MSIs, including:

- Historically Black Colleges and Universities
- Hispanic Serving Institutions
- Tribal Colleges and Institutions
- Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions



Darius Dawson, PhD, DEI Research Supplement award recipient

ORD WORKING GROUP PROMOTES DIVERSITY IN THE SCIENTIFIC WORKFORCE

ORD’s employee-led work group on DEI in VA research focuses on developing a diverse scientific workforce through training and funding opportunities; stimulating research focused on minority health and health disparities; promoting a culture of inclusion in the workplace; and promoting equity and diversity in scientific activities. A vital component of these goals is funding mentored research experiences for early-career investigators from underrepresented backgrounds. To that end, ORD in FY21 awarded its first group of DEI Research Supplement awards pairing junior researchers with established VA scientists.

Photo Credit: Shawn D. James, Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, Houston

SIMULATION TRAINING TO PROMOTE BEST PRACTICES

SimLEARN sponsored an independent initiative to develop and execute a comprehensive, tiered DEI training program (both VR and live) to improve awareness and interpersonal interactions of leadership and frontline staff who interact directly with Veterans. The program encourages supporting behavior modeled on DEI best practices to improve both clinical outcomes for Veterans and work satisfaction for employees. This program has expanded with the ongoing support of VHA leaders, including the VA Secretary’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Task Force, and has led to additional DEI-related proposals for simulation.



CONTINUING A 20-YEAR FOCUS ON HEALTH EQUITY RESEARCH

Established in 2001, the Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion (CHERP, within ORD) is a national VA Center of Innovation focused on detecting, understanding, and reducing disparities in health and healthcare in vulnerable populations. In FY21, among other accomplishments, CHERP investigators used artificial intelligence to pinpoint subgroups of Veterans at high risk and better match them to the right types of care, and introduced a new tool called the surgical pause to screen frail Veterans before surgery.

Staff

Providers

Social Supports

Equity for Veterans

EMBEDDING EQUITY INTO HEALTHCARE FROM THE START

In an article for the American Journal of Medical Quality, DEAN, in collaboration with the Office of Health Equity, discusses how healthcare equity is essential to achieving the goal of “zero harm” sought by high reliability organizations, or HROs. According to the authors, disparities in health and healthcare constitute systemic failures to achieving reliable outcomes for certain groups. By designating equity a crucial element of HRO core concepts, this objective can be embedded into healthcare entities in the most literal sense, resulting in High Equity Reliability Organizations, or HEROs.

STUDY REPORTS ON EXPERIENCES OF LGBT VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual Veterans from the Vietnam era reported PTSD and poorer mental health more often than their heterosexual counterparts, according to an analysis from the Vietnam Era Health Retrospective Observational Study. This ORD study appeared in July 2021 in Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy.

“This study is the first to document sexual orientation differences in trauma experiences, probable PTSD, and health-related quality of life in LGBT Veterans using a nationally representative sample.”

John Blosnich, MD
Senior Author

SPECIAL DNA CHIP HELPS EXPAND GENETIC RESEARCH

VA’s Million Veteran Program, one of the most genetically diverse health-related databases in enrollment, has launched a custom-designed “DNA chip” to expand genetic research for racial and ethnic minority Veterans. The chip tests for more than 750,000 genetic variants, 300,000 of which are more common in minority populations. To conduct the test, researchers apply the patient’s blood to a small silicon chip that contains thousands of tiny bits

of synthetic DNA. The patient’s DNA will bind with matching genetic variants embedded on the chip, allowing researchers to identify the patient’s gene variants. The tool will help VA learn more about conditions such as cancer and diabetes in diverse groups and develop targeted treatments.

Dr. Saiju Pyarajan of the VA Boston Healthcare System led the design of the DNA chip, in consultation with MVP researchers



Photo Credit: Frank Curran



SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

Employment, access to community spaces, and the ability to exercise and socialize are known positive social determinants of health and well-being. All were impacted by the continuing pandemic. In response, HAP partner organizations, such as Y-USA, continued to offer free virtual fitness videos (YMCA360) to help keep Veterans moving. The Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation, another HAP partner, worked to improve Veterans’

economic stability and quality of life. As many people faced job loss, the foundation continued to offer employers training in recruiting Veterans and spreading awareness about the risks of Veteran suicide. With vaccines available this year, Pet Partners, another partner, resumed some in-person visits to provide Veterans with animal-assisted therapy, which can benefit Veterans’ physical, developmental, social, cognitive, or emotional health.

“OHIL is advancing a culture of innovation where diverse perspectives from across VA and the larger innovation community are driving improvements to care nationwide. This repeatable, collaborative process for supporting and spreading innovation is essential to advancing the VHA mission to ensure equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans.”

Ryan Vega, MD
Chief Officer, OHIL

VADIAP: STANDING OUT FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

When Pam Black, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Manager, developed a program at Orlando VA Medical Center to train and empower a cadre of DEI advocates, she turned to the VA Diffusion Marketplace as a resource to market and spread her innovation. A Veteran herself, Ms. Black designed VA Diversity and Inclusion Advocate Program (VADIAP) to assist VA leadership, employees, and Veterans in disseminating information on facility DEI events, promoting DEI ideals in their work through training and skills development, and cultivating a safe place where everyone can report concerns such as workplace discrimination, harassment or wrong-doing. This DEI innovation is emerging and being adopted by Clermont VA Clinic, Crossroads VA Clinic, Deltona VA Clinic, Kissimmee VA Clinic, Lake Baldwin VA Clinic, Tavares VA Clinic, Viera VA Clinic, and William V. Chappell, Jr. Veterans’ Outpatient Clinic.



2021 and Beyond

"We are breaking boundaries by looking outside ourselves, building communities, and learning together how to approach problems in new ways."

Suzy Shirley, LCSW

Director Community Engagement
and Fellowship, VHA IE



Recognizing Success



In 2021, DEAN affiliate program offices conferred awards upon numerous VHA professionals honoring their excellence in education, research, and innovation. Additionally, several DEAN staff and program offices were recognized by external parties for their outstanding contributions.



Jessica Feinleib, MD, PhD

DAVID M. WORTHEN INNOVATOR AWARD

For creating and serving as an expert for the development of the award-winning Difficult Airway Algorithm and Rescue Cricothyrotomy simulation program



Andrew Grock, MD

DAVID M. WORTHEN RISING STAR AWARD

For developing national resiliency curricula to reduce emergency medicine physician and residency burnout, which has been associated with increased medical errors



Ismene Petrakis, MD

DAVID M. WORTHEN CAREER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

For her 30-year career improving and disseminating educational best practices in addiction psychiatry and its interface with the new field of addiction medicine



David X. Cifu, MD

PAUL B. MAGNUSON AWARD

For his contributions to the understanding of traumatic brain injury, polytrauma, and neurodegenerative disease in Veterans



Louis Dell'Italia, MD

JOHN BLAIR
BARNWELL AWARD

For his contributions to the understanding of a relatively uncommon form of heart attack, and other areas of cardiovascular disease



**Donna Washington
MD, MPH**

UNDER SECRETARY'S AWARD IN
HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH

For her contributions to understanding the healthcare needs of diverse Veteran populations, including racial and ethnic minorities



Angela Gant-Curtis

DR. ROBERT L. JESSE AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION
NON-CLINICAL AWARD

For her work standing up an innovation department within the Office of Information Technology



Melissa Tran

DR. ROBERT L. JESSE AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION
CLINICAL AWARD

For her work developing a multi-disciplinary medical team to provide services for perinatal and postnatal Veterans



3D Innovation Center

Ralph H. Johnson Health
Care System, Charleston, SC

DR. ROBERT L. JESSE AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION
TEAM AWARD

For their work developing a 3D-printed medical device (GioStent)

Awards Received by DEAN Staff



Tom Osborne, MD
Project CONVERGENCE

SERVICE TO THE
CITIZEN AWARD

For developing a roadmap for testing technologies enabled by 5G networking



Joshua Patterson
Project Resilience

SERVICE TO THE
CITIZEN AWARD

For utilizing biosensors for monitoring population health



Beth Ripley, MD, PhD
3D Printing Network

SERVICE TO THE
CITIZEN AWARD

For securing mission-critical personal protective equipment (PPE) during COVID-19 by leveraging manufacturing capabilities



Suzy Shirley, LCSW

ARTHUR S. FLEMMING AWARD

For her outstanding achievements in transforming care through collaborations and advancing mission-driven healthcare innovations



VHA Innovation Ecosystem

FAST COMPANY'S BEST
WORKPLACES FOR INNOVATORS

For empowering employees to innovate processes, products, and business methods



Looking Ahead

As a learning organization, DEAN is a catalyst for transformational change across the VHA enterprise. In FY21, much of that change was driven by the learners we are privileged to serve: our Nation's Veterans. These extraordinary individuals are imbued with such a strong sense of service that they choose to serve their country twice: first in uniform and later as collaborators, teachers, researchers, and innovators. These pages have captured a few of these learning experiences.

Like a fingerprint, each Veteran's contribution is unique and enduring, reminding us that healthcare is both personal and interconnected. DEAN looks forward to the impressions we'll make together in FY22.



Nurse Residency Expansion
VETSmile Learning Organization
DEAN Research HERO
Community Partnership Challenge
HAP GioStent RVH SimLEARN
Innovation CCPI REdl
Partnerships Veterans
RIFDI OHIL Minority Summit
VSPN OAA VADIAP COVID-19 Research
Training VHA IE
ORD VA Shield Greenhouse



**Transforming healthcare for Veterans and the Nation
through innovation, training, research, and partnerships.**



Learn more at:
www.va.gov/dean